



## **State of Connecticut**

### **HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STATE CAPITOL**

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### **Testimony**

#### **S.J. No. 23: Resolution Proposing an Amendment to the State Constitution Limiting the Use of Moneys Contained in the Special Transportation Fund**

#### **Transportation Committee**

**March 5, 2014**

Good morning, Chairmen Maynard and Guerrero, Ranking Members Boucher and Scribner, and former fellow members of the Transportation Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of this resolution.

Almost exactly a year ago today, I came before you to testify on a resolution with the very same title, H.J. No. 63. I am very pleased that you have raised the matter again. This is an indication of how seriously you view the precarious state of our transportation funding and of your determination to address it by responsibly managing the revenues the state already collects.

We are all aware of the significant deficiencies of Connecticut's transportation infrastructure. The Regional Plan Association's recent report on the New Haven Line estimated that just to modernize our commuter railroad, we would need \$3.6 billion above what is already budgeted. Repairing our roads and bridges will require billions more.

Despite our pressing need for improvement, repair, and maintenance, the state never seems to have the necessary funds. As many of you have acknowledged, the transportation-related revenues we raise from mass transit fares and gasoline taxes have never been safe from plunder for other purposes. Just last year, \$90 million was taken from the Special Transportation Fund to balance the General Fund, and \$70 million the year before.

This is not a responsible way to manage our transportation dollars or our infrastructure. It is also unfair to commuters and other mass transit users, who are paying for a specific service. They should not have to bear the burden of spending that the state can't afford. When they are forced to pay higher prices, the least they should expect in return is better, faster, or safer service. Instead, they are paying what is tantamount to a tax when the state diverts their money for other purposes.

Both in testimony and as a member of this Committee, I have spoken many times of the necessity to ensure the use of our transportation revenues for transportation purposes by creating a "lockbox" in the Special Transportation Fund. Last year, with this Committee's strong support, the General Assembly passed legislation to do that, beginning on July 1, 2015.

I believe, however, that, given the history of the legislature's allocation of our transportation revenues, a constitutional amendment protecting these funds is necessary. A statute can be changed by a majority vote in the General Assembly. It is far more difficult to change the state constitution, and that is why a constitutional amendment carries so much weight.

To amend the constitution, a resolution must be approved by at least three-fourths of the membership of both chambers of the General Assembly. If that happens, the resolution appears on the ballot in the next general election. If the voters approve it, it immediately becomes an amendment to the Constitution. If, however, it passes by a majority but with less than three-fourths voting in favor in either or both chambers, it is referred to the General Assembly for another vote in the next session. If it is once again approved by a majority in both chambers, it appears on the ballot in the next general election, when it must be approved by a majority of voters. If that happens, as before, it becomes effective immediately. The process is cumbersome, and there are many stages along the way where it can stall or fail.

Because of the complexity of the process, I recommended strongly last year that the Committee seek to amend the constitution, while also seeking to amend the statutes, which would help to protect transportation funds in the near term.

I applaud this Committee and the full General Assembly for supporting the change in our statutes last year. I also remain convinced of the necessity for the constitutional amendment, and I am grateful to you for introducing the resolution.

Our mass transit needs are consequential and urgent. If we don't address them with the seriousness they deserve, we will discourage economic activity, endanger our citizens, and cause serious deterioration in our quality of life. We will also risk facing fixes that are even more costly. Affording the strongest possible protection to our transportation revenues is the right thing to do.

I respectfully urge the Committee to support this resolution.